"th se enduring matinee id ls"

A CHRONOLOGICAL LOOK
AT SOUND SERIALS
(1929 - 1956)

CHAPTER 29
VOLUME 3 — NUMBER 9

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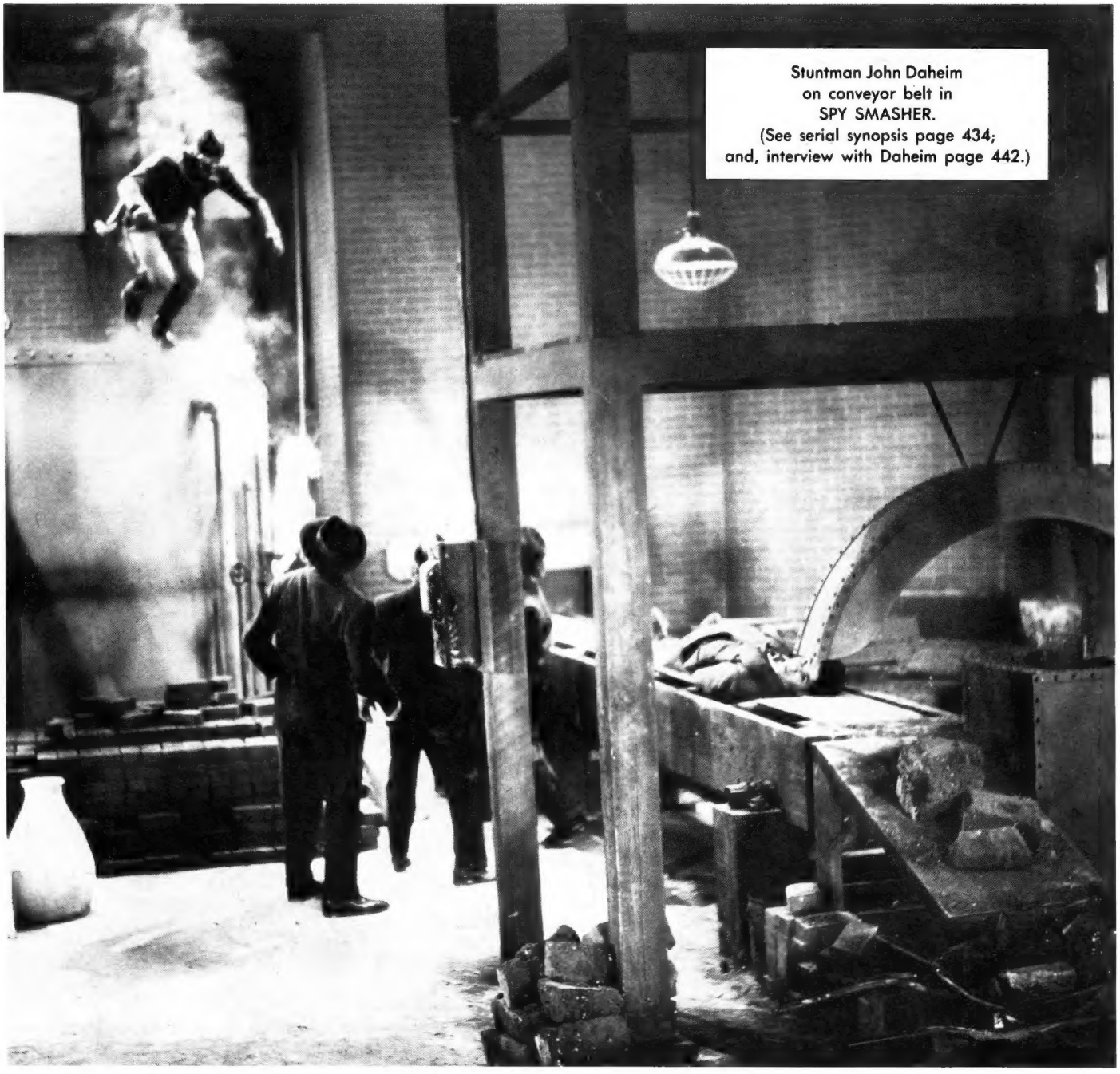


Stuntman John Daheim
on conveyor belt in
SPY SMASHER.
(See serial synopsis page 434;
and, interview with Daheim page 442.)

MASTHEAD: Warren Hull (top) and Reed Hadley.
See Necrology on page 447.

By Robert Malcomson and Eric Hoffman. Photos Courtesy of Angel Gutierrez, Bill Krajcik and Jim Stringham.

FOREWORD

With the tremendous acceptance of ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN MARVEL (1941), Republic Pictures adapted a second Fawcett Publications, Inc. hero for the serial format: SPY SMASHER (released April 4, 1942, tho production started three days before Christmas in 1941). The character was co-featured with Marvel in "Whiz Comics" and eventually he won his own magazine.

Adapting SPY SMASHER to the screen, Republic retained the aviator's alter ego of Alan Armstrong, wealthy playboy, totally ignoring his civilian background except for a brief mention of a "News Service" he reported for a year prior. He allegedly was killed in a plane crash in France, but actually had assumed the role of Spy Smasher so he could "fight the Nazis on their own ground".

To give the plot some intriguing twists, writers Ronald Davidson, Norman S. Hall, William Lively, Joseph O'Donnell and Joseph Poland invented a twin brother for Spy Smasher (Alan Armstrong) and called him ***Jack***. Even today serial enthusiasts question if the writers did not come up with the name as an "in joke".

Both characters were played by Kane Richmond. Thanks to magnificent split-screen work. John Dale was the visual stand-in for over-the-shoulder shots of the brothers together, while Dave Sharpe usually doubled for one or the other (and sometimes ***both*** in the same sequence credited to skillful editing, as in the cliffhanger of episode six, see preceding page, when Spy Smasher is eventually knocked from a platform, unconscious, to a conveyor belt and is carried slowly, relentlessly, toward a revolving brick cutting wheel). Carey Loftin took over mask and goggles for some of the motorcycle work. As Ralph Byrd was the perfect choice for Dick Tracy, Kane Richmond was the same for Spy Smasher.

Three other characters were transferred from the comic book including Alan Armstrong's fiancee Eve Corby, played by Marguerite Chapman. For story purposes, her engagement was transferred to brother Jack, making for some moments when one brother was mistaken for the other. Admiral Corby, Eve's father, Commissioner of Naval Intelligence, was played by Sam Flint. Perhaps the biggest grumble for purists of the strip was the handling of Spy Smasher's nemesis The Mask, master gestapo agent. Always portrayed wearing a face-concealing mask, the villain in the cinematic version spent more time with his facial covering off than on, which raises the question: why the use of the mask at all? Hans Schumm gave his all to the role.

Working for Schumm was Tristram Coffin, properly hypocritical as the quisling Drake. His aid was John James and called Steve. Their specialty was leaking out information to The Mask via a mobile unit under the guise of Trans-Ocean Television News Service. As action heavies Lawlor and Crane (Paul Bryar and Tom London, respectively), they did the necessary dirty work with a vengeance.

Aiding Spy Smasher in Paris and an enemy island foray was French Captain Pierre Durand, who dies saving his friend at the opening of episode four.

Howard Lydecker's special effects were top-notch. One in particular was the Bat plane, a bizarre aircraft, not dissimilar in design to Spy Smasher's own Gyro-Sub of the comic book. However, this time it was utilized by enemy agents (in only chapter four). What made the sequence so believable was the interpolation of a realistic full-size model when the plane was on the ground along with excellent miniature work for the flying sequences.

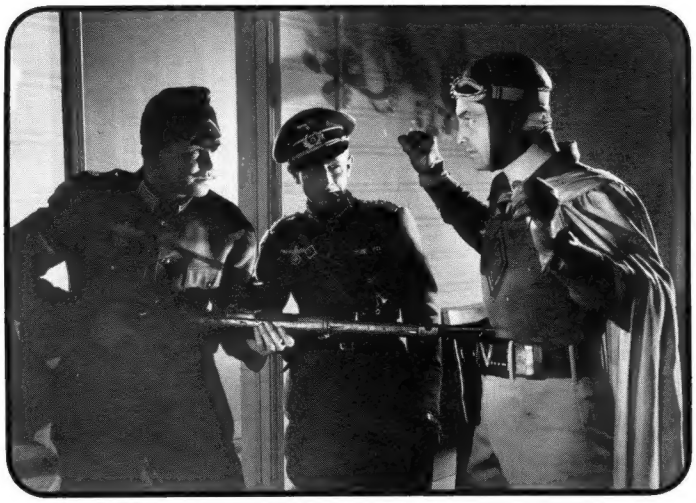
William Witney received, for the first time, sole screen credit for a serial. He kept things moving at an exciting pace. His efforts were complimented by Reggie Lanning's photography, that included some unusual camera angles; and, Mort Glickman's musical score which made use of the four note opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony during the title theme with an animated Morse code "V" (...—) superimposed over the background.

Today SPY SMASHER is still shown in both feature (100 minutes) and full serial versions, retaining high popularity. Ironically, not so the original comic strip hero. Spy Smasher was a character indelibly intertwined with World War II. When the war ended, Spy Smasher was without an enemy to do battle with. Fawcett Publications attempted to continue Alan Armstrong's career in civilian life by renaming him "Crime Smasher". His new assignment was short-lived.

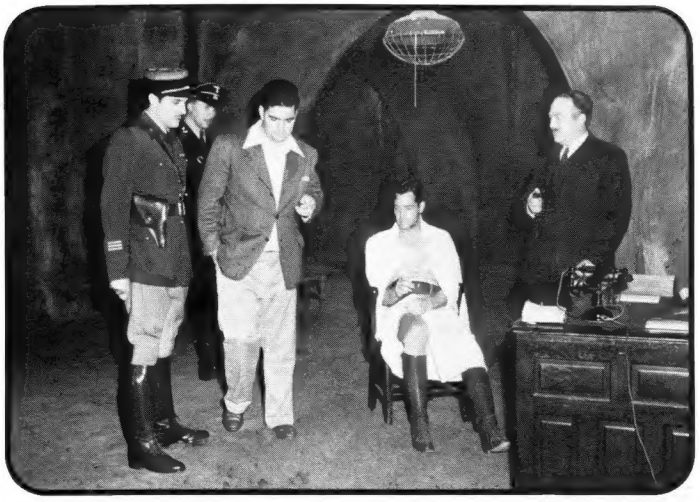
CHAPTER TITLES

1. America Beware
2. Human Target
3. Iron Coffin
4. Stratosphere Invaders
5. Descending Doom
6. The Invisible Witness
7. Secret Weapon
8. Sea Raiders
9. Highway Racketeers
10. 2700° Fahrenheit
11. Hero's Death
12. V . . . —

The serial opens in Paris, France, under German domination . . .



Spy Smasher is captured by a Nazi storm trooper (Fenton Taylor) and his Captain (Frank Alten) in a residence where he has surreptitiously uncovered a plan from "Der Fuehrer" to "The Mask" concerning flooding the U.S. with counterfeit money. (1)



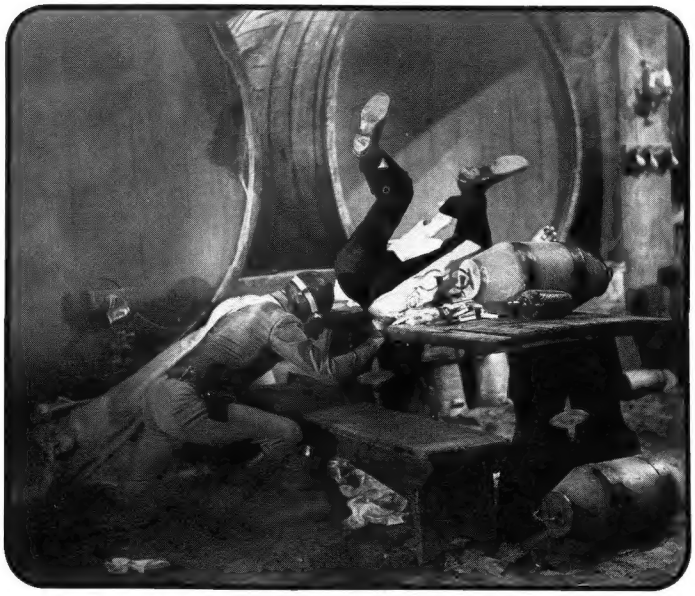
He's taken to a "Gestapo" dungeon and tortured, then placed in a chair for interrogation. (Editor's Note: L. to R. Franco Corsaro; Nick Vehr; Bill Witney, director; Kane Richmond and Henry Zynda. Photo courtesy of Bill Witney.) (2)

Spy Smasher refuses to admit he is an agent for the U.S. Lazar (Henry Zynda) orders Captain Durand to execute him. Durand's French soldiers fire and bullets chip the wall. Spy Smasher feigns death, per arrangement with the Captain. Later he is smuggled out of France to Lisbon . . . and flies to the U.S. (3)

Agents of The Mask (Lawlor and Crane) force Admiral Corby and his daughter to surrender papers showing the location of mines in Shark Bay. Prior, outside the house, Corby's chauffeur has been slugged on the head by Crane. (4)

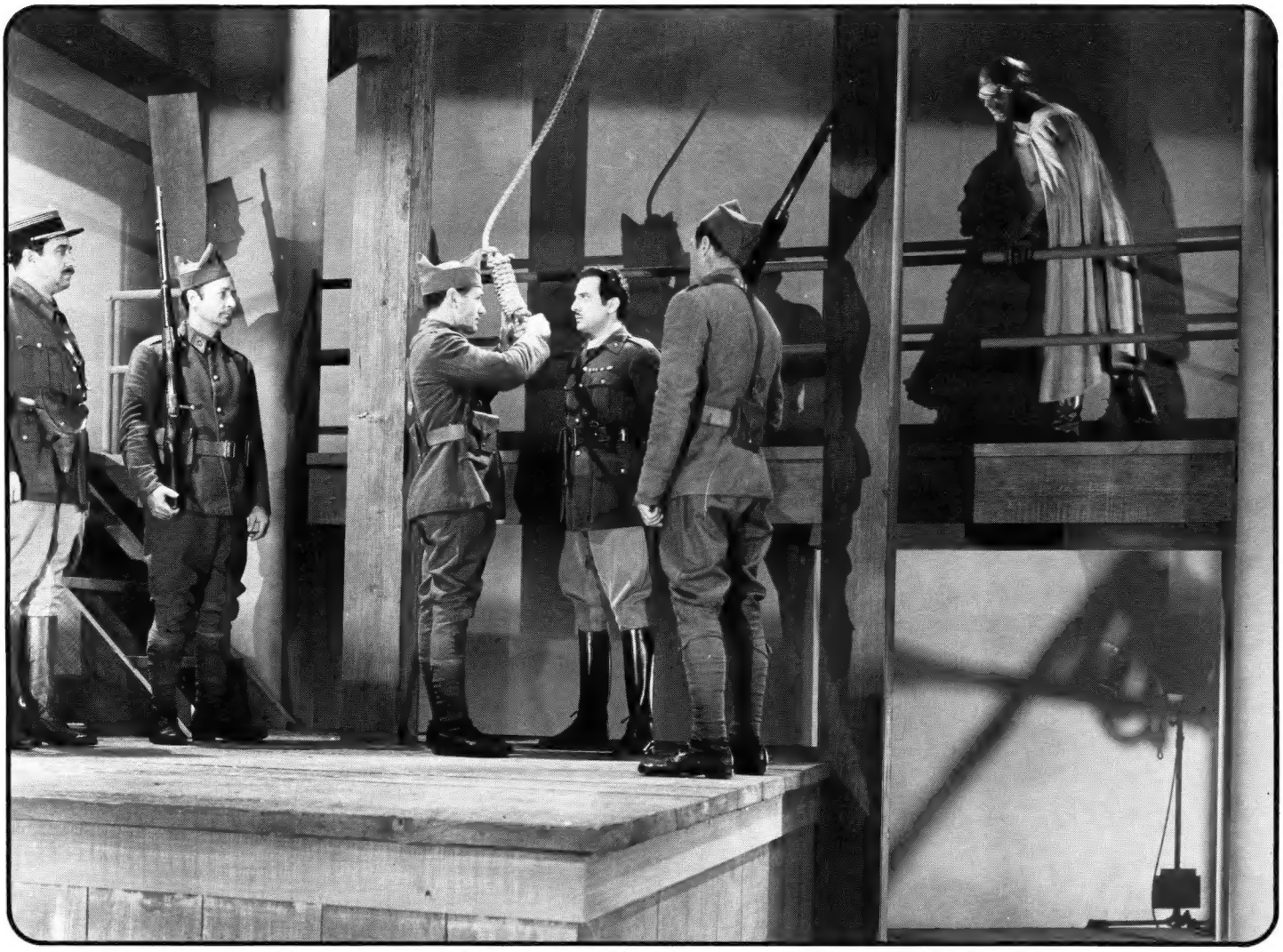
The assault is seen by Jack while he and Alan, his twin brother, reunited earlier, fly over the house. Jack takes over the plane's controls while Spy Smasher bails out. The plans are retrieved. Before meeting Corby and Eve, Alan hides his cape and helmet inside his leather jacket. (5)

The Mask, entrenched in a submarine, uses money-filled buoys to surface counterfeit currency. It's picked up by boat and, thru devious ploys, eventually winds up in the wine cellar of the "Acme Cafe". (6)



A match cover leads Alan to the cafe. There he sees Lawlor and follows him thru a secret door in a phone booth to the cellar. A fight ensues and Spy Smasher is almost killed in a tunnel explosion. (7)

Corby finds the secret entrance leading to the cellar. Jack appears and joins him and his chief operator (Robert Wilke, far left) in examining money. Drake (right) is ostensibly a TV reporter, which lends creditability to his following Corby's movements that are, in turn, relayed to The Mask via television. (8)



Origin of the money is traced to the island of Martindad, off the U.S. coast. It is a French possession under German control. Spy Smasher learns his friend Durand is there, working for the Free French as a secret agent.

Alan flies to the island. He quickly learns Pierre Durand is about to be hung and rescues the Captain from the gallows chamber. (Editor's Comment: Take note of set lighting equipment lower right corner.) (9)

Spy Smasher and Durand manage to board The Mask's submarine! A melee follows and Alan falls to the floor in the torpedo room, hitting his head on a metal object. Durand enters the chamber and Captain Gerhardt (Hans Von Morhart, left) bolts the door. The compartment is slowly flooded when The Mask orders the sea valves opened.

Outside the watertight door, The Mask and Gerhardt look at each other and smile in grim anticipation of the end of their enemies.

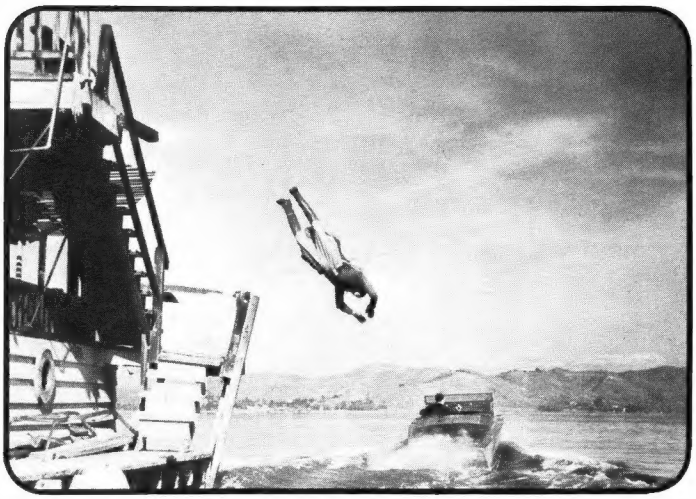
As the iron coffin fills with water, Durand braces the unconscious Spy Smasher against the wall. He sees a cabinet containing a sign "Monsen Lung" (an escape device similar to an aqua lung). Durand puts it on Spy Smasher and propels him thru a torpedo tube to safety. The Frenchman sinks under the water and drowns. (10)

Spy Smasher continues his crusade back in the U.S. His enemies employ the use of the Bat plane, made buoyant thru helium in the wings and capable of descending (or rising) vertically. Alan, after take-off, soon sends it crashing in a mass of flame. He escapes by parachute. (11)

Lawlor wants Jack to sign a confession that he is Spy Smasher. Refusing, he's bound and placed on a conveyor belt normally used for new brick to carry it to a huge cutting blade. (Hans Schumm minus mask is at far left. Right of Richmond are Bill Wilkus and Loren Reibe.) (12)

Enemy agents hi-jack an armored truck containing gold, which Jack had been riding guard. Tho outmaneuvered, he shoots a hole in the gas tank. Spy Smasher appears on motorcycle. He and Jack follow the gasoline trail leading to a billboard camouflaging a dirt road. (13)

Spy Smasher (climax of episode 11) is shot by Drake and his men. He falls from a high building, crashing to the pavement. Eve is at the scene and reacts in horror. However, it is Jack in Spy Smasher's uniform. He tells Eve that Alan is the true protagonist, then dies. (14)



Drake makes contact with The Mask from a deserted riverboat. Spy Smasher has trailed him . . . dives into the water as Drake flees for the submarine in a speedboat. He seizes a mooring line and pulls himself aboard. Drake is knocked unconscious in a fight. (15)

Spy Smasher, driving the launch, rams the sub periscope. In the confusion that follows the sub hits an underwater mine and explodes. Spy Smasher dives overboard and Drake meets a fiery death. Later, Alan is honored for his valor. (16)

A TRIBUTE TO

KANE RICHMOND

"THE OTHER SERIAL HERO"

By L.C. MELCHIOR

•

Photos / Jim Stringham and Bob Malcomson

Looking back, honesty dictates that Larry "Buster" Crabbe must be acknowledged the "King of the Sound Serials". Besides chalking up an impressive nine starring serial roles, the most of any serial actor, Crabbe's serials, especially his Universal efforts, excelled in good acting, quality and production values. Coming up with a second serial hero choice (tho many, however, may consider him as their first choice so far as acting ability is concerned), we can only arrive at the name of KANE RICHMOND. Thus, ***the other serial hero***.

Kane Richmond, who in reality was Fred W. Bowditch, was born and reared in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on December 23, 1906. During his high school and pre-college years, Richmond performed well in most sports — a factor that would prove valuable in his later acting career.

During his days at the University of Minnesota, Richmond developed a fondness and a devotion to acting as well as the motion picture industry. However, it would be some time before he actually did any before-the-camera work. His initial connection with motion pictures was working as a representative of one of the studios, primarily in the Southwestern region. Tiring of long days on the road, Richmond returned to Hollywood where an agent friend of his brought him to the attention of Carl Laemmle, head of Universal Pictures. At this time Universal was gearing its production schedule 100% for "sound" pictures and was seeking a good looking young actor who would fit into their "Leather Pushers" series that they were planning. So, in 1930, Kane Richmond, then 24 years old, after testing for the part, won the role and went on to complete twelve films in the popular series.

Paul Friedman, who was an agent for M-G-M at this time, was on several locations where Richmond was filming the "Leather Pushers". He advised Richmond that he could offer a better opportunity with his studio and the result was "Stepping Out" (1931) and "Strangers May Kiss" (1932), among others. While Richmond was deciding whether he should remain with M-G-M, an offer from Fox Pictures came in 1933 to go to India and make "Devil Tiger". This film, considered by film buffs to be somewhat of a classic, marked Richmond's genuine beginning as an important action personality. It should also be added that Richmond's leading lady in the film was Marion Burns, whom he later married — a union that would happily be a truly lasting one.

Kane and Marion (Burns) Richmond.

Richmond's athletic prowess proved to be an asset to the film. One sequence called for a live python snake to actually wind around Richmond's body. The director (or hierarchy) felt it would be more authentic if the actor handled some of the stunts as well, no matter what danger was involved. Several men would remove the snake from a box, from where it was placed with a dark cloth over its head, for filming and actually coil the reptile around Richmond's body. Shooting would start immediately and finish quickly; however, many men were needed to uncoil the snake before it could do physical harm to Richmond. The actor could have easily requested a stuntman to handle the difficult work. He didn't.

After completing "Devil Tiger", Richmond returned to the United States and started free-lancing. One of his better entries, at the time, was Columbia's "Let's Fall in Love" — a 1934 film that starred Ann Sothern and Edmund Lowe. Richmond was even considered for a singing part in the feature with the selection "This is Only the Beginning"; however, this was dropped at the last minute. Although Richmond did not have a distinctive singing voice, he was destined to vocalize in a later production. Continuing with Columbia, Richmond was featured with Tim McCoy in "Voice in the Night", an off-beat vehicle for McCoy. This was followed by "I Can't Escape" for Beacon Productions and "Circus Shadows" for Peerless Productions.

1935 marked Kane Richmond's debut in the serial field. He was the hero in two excellent and well-paced serials: ADVENTURES OF REX AND RINTY (see TEMI, pg. 70) and THE LOST CITY (see TEMI, pg. 76).

ADVENTURES OF REX AND RINTY, directed by serial veterans Ford Beebe and Reeves Eason, contained fine action and production care that would be a future trademark when Mascot Pictures merged into Republic Pictures. The plot involved the beautiful black stallion, Tex, who was stolen from an island where he was looked upon as a God-like horse by the natives. Those participating in the theft sell the animal to a villainous rancher, played by Harry Woods, after bringing him to the States. The new owner mistreats and beats the horse until Rex finally escapes, teaming up with a wandering dog, Rinty (who is, according to the advertising, Rin-Tin-Tin, Jr. — the alleged "son" of the great Rin-Tin-Tin). In enters polo player, Frank Bradley, played by Richmond, who befriends both animals. After many hazardous situations, Bradley finally returns Rex to his native island. Crawford (Woods) and his accomplices follow Bradley to the island, where more action takes place before a peaceful ending is achieved.

Norma Taylor, Allan Cavan and Richmond in ADVENTURES OF REX AND RINTY.

In THE LOST CITY, Richmond played electrical engineer Bruce Gordon, who develops a wonderous machine that can trace the case of disasters that have been happening across the the nation. He traces the source to somewhere in Africa where he and his comrades start an expedition to investigate. There, Gordon, with his machine, traces the disturbances to the Magnetic Mountain. Within is a hidden city ruled by a scientific madman Zolok, portrayed by William "Stage" Boyd. ("Stage" was added to Boyd's name so that he would not be confused with the established actor William Boyd, who interestingly started the Hopalong Cassidy series the same year.) Through twelve chapters Richmond battles Boyd, who is bent on unleashing his electrical power in an attempt to conquer the world.

The film was independently produced by Sherman S. Krellberg, yet for serials up to and including 1935 it demonstrated a high grade of quality in photography, visual effects, sets plus direction by Harry Revier. A sequel was planned with Richmond and Boyd, since Boyd, as Zolok, could have escaped his destroyed city in the final episode. The project never materialized.

L. to R.: Diminutive Billy Bletcher (whose authoritive voice was dubbed for THE LONE RANGER and Don del Oro in ZORRO'S FIGHTING LEGION), Sam Baker holding Richmond, Claudia Dell, Josef Swickard and Eddie Fetherstone in THE LOST CITY.

What came next for Richmond was a series of action features for Ambassador Pictures (Maurice Conn, President) teamed with Frankie Darro, a familiar name to serial followers. Among their best during 1936 and '37 were "Racing Blood", "The Devil Diamond" and "Anything for a Thrill". Conn also headed-up Melody Pictures and featured Richmond in the musical production "With Love and Kisses" (1936), which starred singer-composer Pinky "Object of My Affection" Tomlin. Richmond was cast as a nightclub singer and this time got the opportunity to do one of Tomlin's original compositions, especially written for the film.

Richmond and Larry "Buster' Crabbe.

During the ensuing years, Richmond's career was an enigma — comparable to a ride on a roller coaster. For example, he was featured with no fanfare as the pilot captain in FLASH GORDON'S TRIP TO MARS (see TEMI, pg. 189) in 1938. Although he appeared in most of the episodes, one wonders why he was not given a better part in the serial because of his past performances. His billing appeared many names down under Larry "Buster" Crabbe's. Then in 1939 he was given excellent billing alongside Randolph Scott, Preston Foster and Margaret Lindsay in 20th Century-Fox's "20,000 Men a Year". However, he disappeared early in the film and was not given much of a chance to emote. 20th also utilized him in "B" pictures. Later, Monogram and Republic considered him "star" material.

In 1942, Richmond made the serial that would destine him to everlasting fame and memory — SPY SMASHER (covered elsewhere in this Chapter of TEMI).

Then, in 1944, Richmond made his second and last serial for Republic Pictures: HAUNTED HARBOR. There were fifteen episodes directed by Spencer Bennet and Wallace Grissell. Briefly, the story concerned Jim Marsden, portrayed by Richmond, as a schooner owner convicted of murder (falsely, of course), who escapes from prison and attempts to clear himself. Throughout the serial, Marsden concerns himself with helping a doctor (killed in episode four) and his daughter, played by Kay Aldridge; fighting off veteran villain Roy Barcroft and his gang of henchmen; investigating a sea monster that guards "Haunted Harbor"; to finally clearing himself of the murder charge. An otherwise routine serial (except for the tremendous miniature work of a sloop in distress in heavy seas, then bombarded by falling rocks, at the climax of episode one) was salvaged thanks to Richmond's handling of his role and Republic's quality of production.

Richmond in HAUNTED HARBOR — Climax of Episode 10.

Kane Richmond's last three serials were for Sam Katzman at Columbia Pictures. Although he gave inspired performances, he was hampered by the ridiculous contrivances that the studio was noted for, so far as Katzman's serials were concerned.

In BRENDA STARR, REPORTER (1945), based on the popular comic strip, Richmond played Lt. Larry Farrel. His principal contribution was getting the main character out of scrape after scrape. Richmond was billed second to Joan Woodbury, a good and attractive actress who certainly did better in features.

Joan Woodbury, Richmond, Jack Ingram and Wheeler Oakman in REPORTER.

Richmond and Anthony Warde in REPORTER.

The same year, Richmond played the lead once more in the jungle adventure appropriately called JUNGLE RAIDERS. Richmond was cast as Bob Moore, and attempts to rescue his doctor/father who had been captured by that wonderful actor/villain Charles King and his gang. Production-wise, it was superior to BRENDA STARR, REPORTER because it was filmed, mostly, outside of confining studio "barns". Richmond was ably assisted by Eddie Quillan, Veda Ann Borg and Carol Hughes.

Richmond, Kermit Maynard, Eddie Quillan and Charles King in JUNGLE RAIDERS.

Kane Richmond's final serial was BRICK BRADFORD (1947), again based on a popular comic strip. Playing the title role, he is asked by the United Nations to protect an anti-guided missile not yet perfected. Although directed by capable veteran Spencer Bennet, the serial was weak in structure and lacked inspiration. Even Richmond's abilities (or Bennet's, for that matter) could raise it out of the ordinary. One of the better remembered sequences was the innovation of a "crystal door" which could transport people to the Moon. However good the novelty it was carelessly, and almost foolishly, put to use.

Richmond and Linda Johnson.

It would be an injustice to Richmond to end his screen career on a negative note. He is much remembered for his three "Shadow" motion pictures for Monogram in 1946 based on the popular magazine and radio character; also, for "Tiger Woman" (not the serial), "Passkey to Danger" and "Traffic in Crime" at Republic Studios in the '40s.

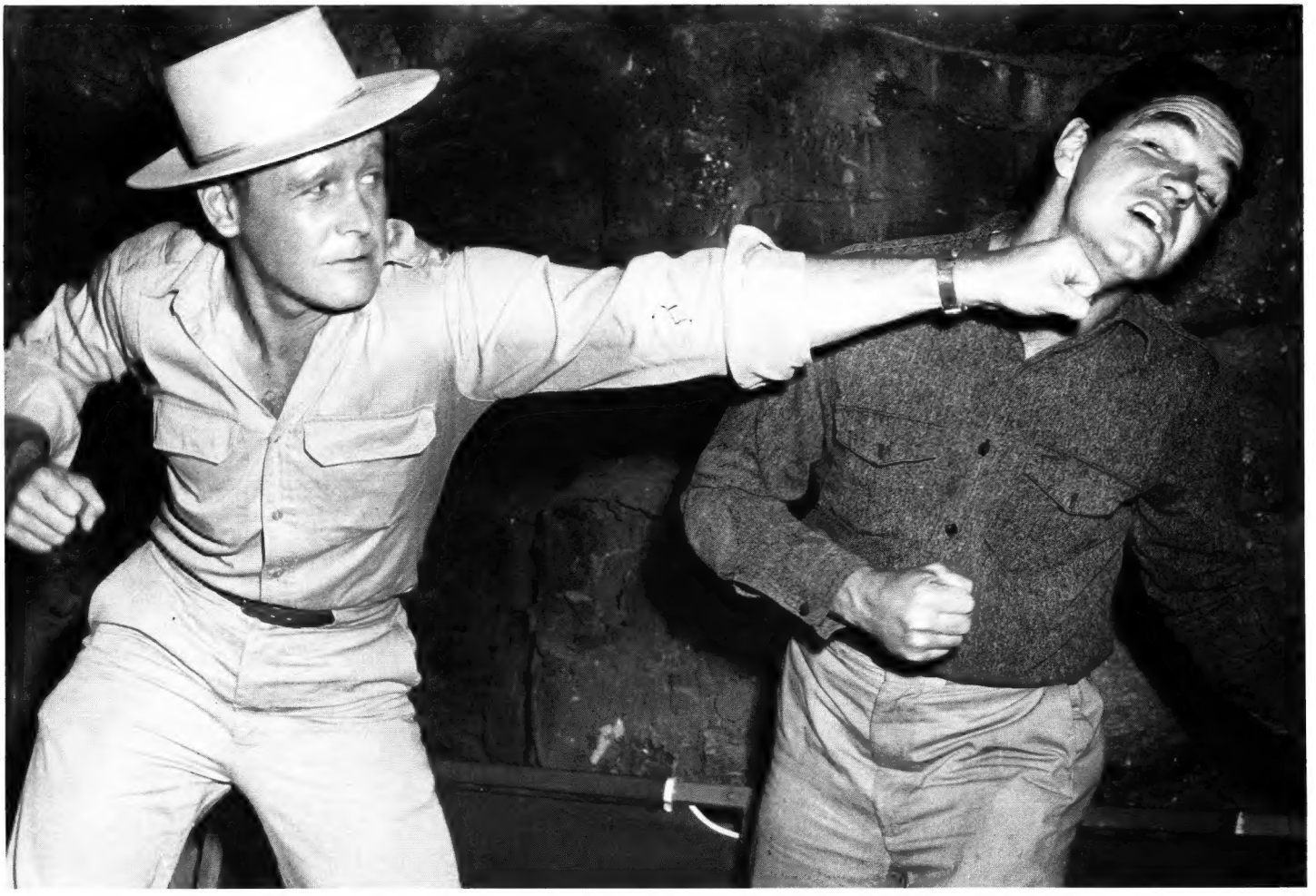
Above feature released 1946. Serial (Same title) with different plot and cast released in 1944.

Kane Richmond retired early (1948) from films. He entered the fashion industry and became highly successful as a representative for a large manufacturing company.

As previously reported in TEMI (see pg. 343), Kane Richmond died on March 22, 1973 at age 66.

MEN OF ACTION

By HARRY SANFORD



Myron Healey and John (Day) Daheim in PANTHER GIRL OF THE KONGO (Rep., 1955).

JOHN DAHEIM'S Hollywood career began in 1936 . . . and rolled along with long periods of not working, and bucking one of the toughest cliques going at the time: the old line stunt gang that ruled with an iron fist each studio, and saw to it who got work and who did not.

"I was trying to get in at Warner Bros.," Daheim recalled. "The ramrods there were Allen Pomeroy, Harvey Perry and Duke Green. I was really just a kid and they made it rough. Nothing personal. They were protecting their territory (jobs) and were none too anxious to take in some punk kid, as they saw it." But John Daheim was not one to be turned back. He was determined that he was going to crack it and ***he did***. He let it be known that he would take on each and every one who figured he wasn't going to make it. Harvey Perry (long time double for James Cagney) heard about it and contacted John. "Hear you're pretty handy, ay, kid? Well, let's work out a few bits and see what you can do."

"That was about 1939," John recollected, "and from then on I've been working. Of course there have been slack periods . . . too many of 'em, but that you have to contend with.

"I worked with a lot of wonderful people. And some of their names the average movie-goer never heard of. Post Parks was the greatest 'six-up' (stagecoach) driver that ever lived. There were others. Joe Yrigoyen, still, and old Bud Osborne, who of course was an actor. I remember once riding with Post down some gawd awful cliff-side trail lickity-split — the coach rocking and pitching from side to side. I could have reached out from either side and scooped up dirt and I figured this would be my last ride ***anywhere***. But Post hauled her in at the bottom of the run and just grinned at me as to say 'what were you worrying about kid?'. He was something, that guy."

Questions . . .

HS: What was your first serial?

JD: Boy, let me see. It was in 1941 at Republic; SPY SMASHER, I think. Yeah, that's right. Did that for Billy Witney. I was one of the heavies at the brick yard (in chapter ten). Also, I doubled Kane Richmond on the conveyor belt. [Editor's Note: Daheim doubled Jack Armstrong, Spy Smasher's brother. See cover illustration.]

HS: What in the making of serials stands out in your mind?

JD: The work and the hours involved. You see, in those days we worked twelve and fourteen hours a day and Saturdays, too. Freddie Graham (stuntman) said it as well as anybody: "Do it right, but only do it once!" The budgets were short and time was always a factor.

HS: Was it more fun then than now?

JD: Oh, hell, yes. My God, no comparison. Look, I don't live in the past but those days, well they are an era that you'll never see again. We had fun; great people to work with and really enjoyed what we were doing.

HS: What studio did you enjoy working for most of all?

JD: Any place that hired and paid me for a job! But in regards to serials and action pictures, there was only one place: Republic. They had everything geared to make action films.

HS: Can you define "everything" for us?

JD: Sure. Talent and craft up and down the line. For special effects, Babe (Howard) and Ted Lydecker. Nobody could touch them. The best action cameramen: Bill Nobles, Jack Marta, John MacBurnie, Reggie Lanning and Bud Thackery. Bud, for example. He's fast and knows the whole business about shooting pictures. Raymond Burr

("Ironside") knows this and that's why Bud for so many years was HIS man. Bud learned and perfected his craft at Mascot and Republic. Most of the people who came into Revue-Universal were all from Republic when it folded.

HS: What about the various directors?

JD: I assume you mean serial directors. Again I would have to say Republic with Billy Witney, Jack English and Spence Bennet. They knew . . . they just simply knew what to do and how to do it. And remember they did not have the luxury of shooting something six or seven times until they were satisfied. They would lay an action scene out, go over it with us, asking our opinions, then set it up and we took off. I always played a bad guy and never won a fight. I guess I join Fred Graham in that boat, too." [See Fred Graham interview on pages 332 and 333.]

* * *

But John Daheim had long range plans. He had learned his craft with the likes of Witney, English and Bennet and learned it well. In addition he was a pretty good actor and using the name John Day he began to act more and more, but all the while learning everything he could about the actual making of films. "I knew one day that time and old bones would eventually bring stunting to an end, though Harvey Perry is still at it and he's 73 years young."

He ***fought*** Kirk Douglas in the memorable "Champion" (1949), and did likewise with Tony Curtis in "The Square Jungle" (1956). Being able to fight and knowing how to throw a punch got him an assignment at 20th Century-Fox to set up some brawling in "Where the Sidewalk Ends" (1950), directed by Otto Preminger. In one scene, Dana Andrews, whom Daheim doubled in several films, follows gangster Gary Merrill into a steam room. Several thugs jump him and there is a fight. Preminger got a man to fight with Andrews and informed a concerned Daheim. "I didn't know the guy . . . he was not a stuntman, but had been a boxer. I told Mr. Preminger that I'd rather get someone like Charlie Horvath, who looks like a pug and would know how to do it. We could not double Dana as it was close up. My judgment was overruled and just as I feared, the guy didn't know how to pull a punch and busted Dana in the face, breaking his nose. I learned a lesson: never to have anybody do that to me again."

For a number of years, John Daheim has been staging action for some of Hollywood's biggest epics. "Been living in Europe almost as much as I have in the States," he reflected. Most recently he was stunt coordinator and second unit director of Universal's blockbuster, "Earthquake", where approximately one hundred and fifty stunt men and women were used. "Everything I ever learned was put to use in this film. Believe me, those serial days came right to mind." Currently, Daheim is performing the same chores on "The Hindenburg", using a battery of stunt specialists for fire scenes when the dirigible explodes.

* * *

More questions . . .

HS: Are the stuntmen today better, worse, or what in comparison to when you started out and were doing serials, Westerns, and the like?

JD: Some people might expect me to duck that, but I won't. They are different. The times are different and the films are different. But remember we still have Harvey Perry, Dave Sharpe, Dale Van Sickel, Tom Steele, Henry Wills, Gil Perkins and Carey Loftin. [Editor's Note: Loftin's mastery with automobiles is much in evidence in the current "The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3". In fact, he is given screen credit.] Like all of us, they are older, but still know what it is all about.

HS: That still does not quite answer what I had in mind.

JD: The new crop doesn't have the background or the times we had. They are more, oh, computer types. Back then, we had a hell raising, great bunch of guys. In addition to those I just mentioned, there were Duke Green, Fred Graham, Ken Terrell, Bud Wolfe, Eddie Parker, Ted Mapes, Jock Mahoney, Jimmy Fawcett and George De Normand. No, you'll never have people like that again, same as you'll never have the great Cowboy stars like Maynard, Jones, Elliott, Brown, and of course the serials. In the old days there were over a hundred Westerns a year made and twelve or so serials. That meant action; that meant work. There aren't fifty pictures made a year in Hollywood anymore. If it weren't for TV . . . well, it's too scary to think about.

* * *

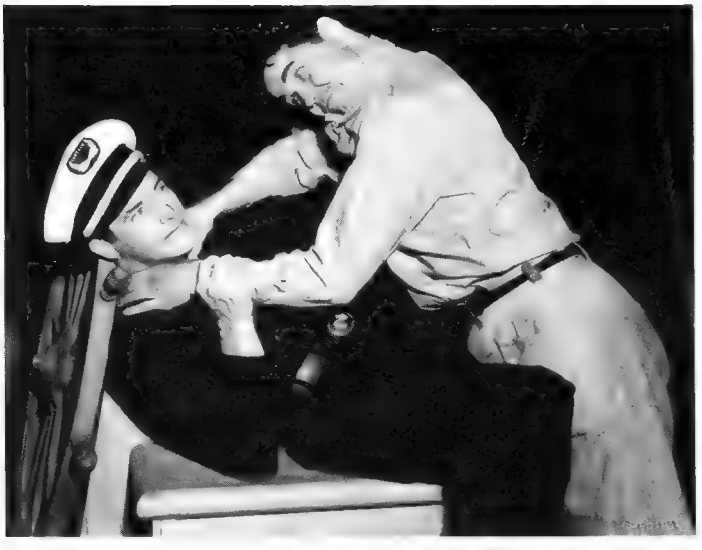
Although the late Tim Holt was one of the three top Western stars (the other two being Roy Rogers and William "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd) who never made a serial, it is noteworthy that John Daheim doubled for Holt in the long series he did at R.K.O. Pictures. "Tim was a great guy, though it took a while to get to know him," remembers Daheim. "A top notch rider . . . military style. Learned that from his dad, Jack." Jack Holt appeared in a 1916 silent serial as well as HOLT OF THE SECRET SERVICE (1941). Also worth mentioning is that Les Selander directed many of the Cassidy/Holt Westerns, but only one serial, JUNGLE RAIDERS (1945) with Kane Richmond.

* * *

John Daheim has received reams of publicity for his work on "Earthquake" — as well as screen credit. Much deserved. And now TEMI readers can match the name to a face. Should you meet him, you would like him, inspite of the fact he is remembered, by many, as an action heavy in serials.

●

Photos Courtesy of
John Hagner (El Jon Publications),
Bill Krajcik and Jim Stringham.



Kane Richmond and Daheim in HAUNTED HARBOR (Rep., 1944).

Actor, George Lewis, Daheim in GHOST OF ZORRO.

CONCERNING SERIALS & TRENDS/ By RON STEPHENSON

Charles Middleton, J. Carrol Naish and Gus Glassmire (as a zombie).

Can you imagine a movie with an incredibly stereotyped Japanese spy, Doctor Daka (played by J. Carrol Naish, whose real name was Joseph Patrick Carrol Naish) having a machine to turn people into zombies and a pit filled with "pet" alligators? In one scene he is shown throwing hunks of meat to his "pets". After running out, he tells them there is no more. Smiling evily at a zombie standing next to him, he sees an easy solution for providing his "pets" with additional food.

The film was BATMAN, a 15-episode serial released by Columbia Pictures in 1943, during World War II. Throughout the story there were many outlandish racial slurs with the Japanese being called Nips, dirty Japs, and little imps of Satan. At one point Dr. Daka is told that his liver is the same color as his skin.

At this time in history many features and serials had elements of propaganda, but BATMAN went beyond limits of belief.

* * *

This article concerns itself with the use or misuse of nationalities and minority races in serials.

Out of 231 serials made during the sound era, only one had a genuine "non-white" hero: Republic Pictures' ROBINSON CRUSOE OF CLIPPER ISLAND (1936). It starred (Ray) Mala as a Polynesian member of U.S. Intelligence. Actually, Mala was an Eskimo by birth. To balance his (Polynesian) ancestry, the heroine was Hawaii born Mamo Clark.

Two Columbia serials, WHITE EAGLE (1941) and BLACK ARROW (1944), had Indian heroes, but in the final chapter it was revealed that they were really white and only raised by the Indians.

In the cases of ROBINSON CRUSOE and WHITE EAGLE, an escape route by the producers was necessary since hero and heroine would obviously wed after the fade-out — and audiences, at the time, refused to accept the idea of miscegenation.

* * *

One blatant falsehood occurred in Columbia's DEADWOOD DICK (1940). There was, indeed, a person in the old west who went by that name. In the serial he was white-skinned, but the real "Deadwood Dick" was black.

Negro actors occasionally appeared in serials, but usually only as comedy relief. Sometimes the scripts even went so far as to suggest that it is preferable to be an Indian or a white man than black-skinned!

In chapter two of HAWK OF THE WILDERNESS (1938), the hero and his friends are being held prisoner by the Chief of a lost tribe of Indians. The Chief expressed puzzlement over negro actor Snowflake's dark skin. One of the captives tells the Chief that if he does not free them, his skin will also turn black! He screamed with fright at that possibility and promptly released the group. Digressing for a moment, in the same serial's last chapter the hero (a pseudo Tarzan) was called an imitation white man. While the earlier incident was done for comedy, even though it was not very funny, the latter was meant to be serious and there was a reason for it. In order to leave the island they are stranded on, one person has to stay behind because the aircraft that will take them back to civilization will hold only so many people. After insulting the hero, it becomes obvious who will be killed in an accident so the rest can leave.

Jerry Frank and Snowflake.

THE LOST CITY (1935) was rampant with racism. In the first episode, a group of men hear a scream coming from a grass hut and one yells: "That sounds like a white woman's scream."

Later, one of the most incredible moments of serial history occurs when a tribe of white pigmies are found. The heroine's father says that many years before he discovered a serum that will turn black people white. A black man begs the kindly old scientist to turn him white. When the transformation is complete, he is congratulated with responses like: "Doc, you're a genius!" and "This is the greatest invention ever!".

Josef Swickard, Sam Baker, William "Stage" Boyd, Billy Bletcher and Jerry Frank.

As was illustrated earlier in BATMAN, it was usually Orientals that got the worst of the racism because of the fear of the "yellow peril". (An exception was THE GREEN HORNET'S faithful Japanese valet, Kato, in two serials produced prior to World War II.)

Jean Rogers and Charles Middleton.

Going back to 1936 with the release of FLASH GORDON, and in two subsequent serials, perhaps the greatest Oriental villain in serial history appeared — but not on this planet. He was called Ming the Merciless, and Charles Middleton's make-up left no doubt he was intended to be taken as an Oriental.

1940 sounded the DRUMS OF FU MANCHU. The nationality of the nefarious Oriental doctor is alluded to as Asiatic, which takes in a lot of territory.

* * *

Before the United States actually entered the war in December, 1941, nationalities were not mentioned. But it was impossible not to guess which country a spy came from. His name and/or heavy German accent took care of that. Case in point is KING OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED (1940), tho all the espionage and sabotage took place in Canada. The following year, innuendo (and not subtle in the least) told you that Germany was behind "Fifth Column" activities in KING OF THE TEXAS RANGERS.

After Pearl Harbor it was considered permissible to show the Germans and Japanese as inhuman monsters.

Republic's first serial of the second world war, SPY SMASHER, is discussed elsewhere in this Chapter of TEMI. A point should be made that most Germans were actually played by actors of German descent. Not so the Japanese. They were in detention camps and so the roles were played by Chinese, Korean or ***white*** actors.

Nestor Paiva, William Vaughn and
Abner Biberman salute their respective leaders
in KING OF THE MOUNTIES.

In October, 1942, Republic released KING OF THE MOUNTIES. It had representatives of all three axis powers operating in Canada. The Japanese had a unique flying craft called "The Falcon". Very conspicuous on the craft were markings of the "Rising Sun". In 1951, six years after the war was over, Republic reused footage of "The Falcon" in a science-fiction cliffhanger, FLYING DISC MAN FROM MARS. It was quite amusing to see the "Rising Sun" on a Martian space ship.

THE MASKED MARVEL (1943) was a mystery man, one of four insurance investigators who attempt to track down Sakima, a Japanese saboteur. In the last chapter Sakima and the Marvel engage in a gunfight in the former's hideout. After the Marvel fires six bullets, Sakima emerges from his hiding place to announce: "Your bullets are gone, but I still have one left." He is felled by another bullet, then the Marvel asks: "Didn't it occur to your Oriental mind that I might reload?". Sakima was played by Johnny Arthur, known principally as a comedian.

Johnny Arthur and William Forrest.

Rod Cameron played G-Man Rex Bennett in two of the most action-packed serials ever made: G-MEN vs. THE BLACK DRAGON and SECRET SERVICE IN DARKEST AFRICA. In the former he was assisted by a female member of the British Secret Service and a member of the Chinese Secret Service against Haruchi, head of the Black Dragon Society. Haruchi and his henchmen wore rather unconvincing Japanese make-up.

One bit of amusing patriotism was that a villainous organ grinder used a raven in helping Haruchi (Nino Pipitone). At the fade-out of the last chapter, Rex asks the raven to show his colors and the bird waves a miniature American flag.

George Lewis, Nino Pipitone, Constance
Worth and Noel Cravet in G-MEN.

In SECRET SERVICE IN DARKEST AFRICA, Sultan Abou Ben Ali was kidnapped by look-alike Nazi officer, Baron Von Rommler. Von Rommler posed as the good Sultan in an attempt to foil Bennett from getting the Arabs to join forces with the Allies.

L. to R.: John Daheim, George Lewis, Duke Green, Rod Cameron and Duncan Renaldo in SECRET SERVICE.

Like BATMAN, G-MEN and SECRET SERVICE were released in 1943. Then Columbia and Republic tired of out-and-out war propaganda films.

* * *

Over at Universal, DON WINSLOW OF THE NAVY was filmed just before Pearl Harbor was attacked — so Winslow fought only his arch enemy from the comic strip, The Scorpion (who wore no mask). But in a follow-up sequel DON WINSLOW OF THE COAST GUARD, The Scorpion joined forces with the Japanese and Germans.

Don Terry as Navy Cdr. Winslow.

Sometimes the Germans turned up in the strangest places in 1944. THE GREAT ALASKAN MYSTERY concerned a group of Nazis trying to steal a ray gun in the frozen North. Oddly enough, no one suspected that a character with the name of Doctor Hauss was a spy until the final episode.

The most absurd of all was RAIDERS OF GHOST CITY, which took place during the Civil War. A group of supposed Confederate soldiers was raiding gold shipments, but in chapter five it was revealed that they were actually Prussian (German) spies.

* * *

One thing that was missing from the serials of World War II (but not the features) was battle scenes on the war front. This was impossible because of severe budget limitations. True, the Don Winslow serials did have naval battles, but it was obvious that they were from newsreel footage. Also lacking (and not missed) from serials were war atrocities.

When the war finally ended in 1945, Hollywood also ended their war.

Next came the "Red Menace" in the '50s and the United States was once more being periled with agents from an unnamed European country. But now their names were Boris and Ivan.

Sometimes even invaders from outer space were pseudo-Communists. In the already mentioned FLYING DISC MAN FROM MARS, the martian invader attempts to steal atomic weapons in which to enslave the planet Earth. The hero guessed that a foreign power was to blame.

Columbia's CAPTAIN VIDEO (1951) had Earth invaded by minions of Vultura, ruler of the planet Atoma. Oddly enough, Vultura had a Brooklyn accent, which suggested the quality of the serial. In the last chapter, Captain Video and Ranger, his aide, return to Earth after defeating Vultura. The good Captain says that he arranged for free elections on Atoma before they left. When asked by his assistant how he knows that they will not change their minds, the Captain replies: "There isn't a person in the Universe who wouldn't have freedom and free elections if they were allowed to." No difficulty in guessing which country he was suggesting as oppressing its citizens.

Several Republic serials were more direct. In CANADIAN MOUNTIES vs. ATOMIC INVADERS (1953) an agent from an unnamed Eastern European country was attempting to build missile launching platforms in the wilds of Canada as a vanguard for an invasion of Canada and the United States. Republic's last serial, KING OF THE CARNIVAL (1955), had a group of counterfeiters operating in a circus. Their purpose was to ruin the credit of the United States so, as a foreign speaking member of the gang said: "Then the countries of the world will do business with ***my*** country."

Nationality was not mentioned for diplomatic reasons, since the serials would be circulated throughout the world (except, perhaps, Communist countries).

One main difference between the propaganda of World War II and of the fifties was that the former was more interested in exploiting the potential menace of the individual German and Japanese spy and the latter the menace of Communism itself.

* * *

EDITOR'S NOTES

I have rewritten Mr. Stephenson's concluding remarks, incorporating some of his thoughts along with my own.

Production of new serials ceased almost twenty years ago. When they were popular during the '30s, '40s and early '50s, no doubt they did reflect the general public's attitudes of the day.

Today some of these serials are still shown in theatres and on TV — and we (as adults) laugh at the exaggerated stereotyped images. We may think that this is all a thing of the past. But is it? Frankly, no. As the Legionnaires so rousingly sang in ZORRO'S FIGHTING LEGION: "We ride with the wind . . ."

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ERRATUM AND ADDENDA

Concerning the Dennis Moore article (pgs. 418-19). He played Craig Foster and ***not*** Larry Foster in THE PURPLE MONSTER STRIKES. It was carried as Larry in the press material, but was changed for the film. Moore, billed as Denny Meadows, appeared as Herb Slack in TAILSPIN TOMMY in 1934. Moore was ***not*** a Nazi agent in THE MASTER KEY. The typesetter goofed on this one and we missed it. Moore, also, showed up in episode eight of DESPERADOES OF THE WEST (Rep., 1950) as Ned Foster. The only clinger was that it was all stock footage from the 1942 Republic feature "Raiders of the Range", and was rather an extensive clip.

Photo identifications. Page 422, that's Jack Kenny and Howard Mitchell in No. 8 as policemen and Duke Taylor being knocked off ship in No. 11. Page 423, that's Buddy Roosevelt and George Allen with Sharpe in No. 15; the name Hawks is mentioned in No. 14, but this is a typo and it is really Hawes.

Many wrote in and identified the actor with Edmund Cobb and Tim McCoy on page 426. It is Joe Bonomo.

W. J. Ryan brought to our attention that Marion Shockley (pg. 426) is the widow of Bud Collyer, well-known TV personality on "To Tell the Truth" and "Beat the Clock". Mr. Collyer died 9/8/1969.

The Editor

ENIGMA

Does anyone know the whereabouts of Franklin (Franklyn) Adreon who was a writer at Republic Studios, later associate producer on their last 19 serials (as well as director of the final five)? He dropped out of the Writers Guild over 22 years ago.

Ray Stanich
Brooklyn, N.Y.

NECROLOGY

Walter Brennan (born 7/25/1894) passed away on 9/21/1974. He appeared in eight serials, four of which were sound: HEROES OF THE FLAMES (1931), THE AIR MAIL MYSTERY (see TEMI, pg. 15 for photo of Brennan), THE PHANTOM OF THE AIR (1933) and TAILSPIN TOMMY (1934).

William John Ryan
Bronx, N. Y.

Reed Hadley, 63, died on December 13, 1974. (See interview with Mr. Hadley on pgs. 366-68.)

Warren Hull, 71, died on September 14, 1974. He starred in THE SPIDER'S WEB (see pg. 211), MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN (see pg. 260) and the yet to be reported (in TEMI) THE SPIDER RETURNS and THE GREEN HORNET STRIKES AGAIN.

Johnny Mack Brown, 70, died November 14, 1974. He was born September 1, 1904. (There will be an article on Mr. Brown in the next Chapter of TEMI.)

Bob Custer, 76, died on December 27, 1974. He was the hero in LAW OF THE WILD, pgs. 27-8. (Info from Ron Coons, Louisville, Ky.)

KARL DANE

Considering the fine article presented on THE WHISPERING SHADOW (TEMI, Chapters 27 & 28), where much was mentioned about the fine silent actor, Karl Dane, I thought readers might enjoy some further facts.

Dane was born in 1886. He was a tall and lanky Danish actor, who started his motion picture career as a studio carpenter and helper. However, a part in the now classic 1925 film, "The Big Parade", with John Gilbert, made him an instant film personality. As a result, until the end of the silent era, he enjoyed an association with Hollywood's greatest stars. Many remember him today as being teamed with George K. Arthur in light comedy parts at M-G-M. With the advent of sound, because his voice had a noticeable accent, his film career started to decline. He was limited to minor parts that did not do justice to the talent he possessed. Lonely, despondent, and almost forgotten, he ended his life by his own hand in 1934, at the age of 48. His last great effort was in THE WHISPERING SHADOW.

L. C. Melchior
Lafayette, La.

EDMUND COBB (born 6/23/1892) passed away on August 15, 1974. He was 82. His wife died in July. (Editor's Note: Reader W. J. Ryan sent us a listing of six silent serials in which Mr. Cobb appeared, as well as 59 sound serials. Photographer Richard Harrison, Los Angeles, took the above picture of Mr. and Mrs. Cobb several years ago at a party for silent and sound serial players.)

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* * *

[Unsolicited comment on SERIAL WORLD magazine from the editor of TEMI: Jeff Walton, and staff, get better and better with each issue. I know them all. Fine people. But what really matters is the end product they produce. I strongly suggest you send for a copy of issue No. 3]

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